

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Project background (Fig. 1)

Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of Robert Hitchins Ltd to undertake a programme of archaeological works to mitigate the impact of residential development on land at Kingshill North, Cirencester. Fieldwork was carried out in order to comply with a condition attached to planning permission granted by Cotswold District Council (application ref: 07/00748/OUT). The work was carried out between April and August 2008 in line with a written scheme of investigation (OA 2008) prepared by OA and agreed with Cotswold District Council and its archaeological advisers.

The Kingshill North development is located to the north-east of Cirencester and centred on grid reference SP 0365 0250 (Fig. 1). The site is bounded by Burford Road to the north, London Road to the south, the gardens of existing housing to the west, and the A417/419 Trunk road to the east. The excavation area was on the western side of the development site and measured 5.8 ha (Figs 2 and 3). The site was under arable cultivation, except for the northern area, which comprised disused allotments and an early-modern waste disposal site. The waste disposal site was not subject to archaeological mitigation. A watching brief was maintained at the site after the main excavation stage.

## Fieldwork methodology (Fig. 4)

Topsoil and overburden were removed by mechanical excavator using a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision. Mechanical excavation ceased at either undisturbed natural deposits or when archaeological features were identified. The nature of these deposits was assessed by hand excavation. The spoil heaps and exposed features were scanned for metal finds by a competent metal-detectorist using suitable equipment. OA staff were trained as detectorists and therefore the work was done under archaeological conditions.

Data-capture for site plans was by a combination of EDM and GPS. Data-capture for site plans was, as standard, capable of reproduction at a scale of 1:100; more complex features or areas of complex archaeological remains were recorded at greater resolution (for reproduction at 1:10, 1:20, or 1:50 as necessary). The sections of excavated archaeological features were recorded by measured drawing at an appropriate scale (1:10). Spot heights and levels of individual features were recorded relative to Ordnance Datum (OD).

All features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers, and context recording was carried out in accordance with established OA practice (Wilkinson 1992). The environmental sampling strategy included the routine sampling of undisturbed, securely dated deposits for the retrieval and assessment of the preservation conditions and potential for analysis of all biological remains. The sampling strategy included a programme of sampling and assessment for charred plant macrofossils, molluscs, animal and human bone. All environmental work was undertaken in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines.

All artefacts were treated in accordance with United Kingdom Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (Archaeology Section) guidelines (Watkinson and Neal 1998). All registered finds were processed and packaged according to standards of good practice. In accordance with current English Heritage guidelines, all iron objects, a selection of non-ferrous artefacts (including all coins) and a sample of any industrial debris relating to metallurgy were submitted for X-radiography and stabilisation where appropriate.

The human remains (and articulated animal remains) were cleaned with minimal disturbance prior to recording and removal. Investigation and excavation of human remains were undertaken by, or under the supervision of, suitably experienced specialist staff and in accordance with IFA guidelines.

## Geology and topography (Fig. 5)

The Kingshill North site is located close to the junction of the Cotswolds dip slope and the flat lands of the upper Thames valley (see Fig. 25). The River Churn, which flows roughly from north to south through Cirencester and into the Thames near Cricklade about 13 km away, is at its closest point c 800 m south-west of Kingshill North. The site is highest in the north and plateaus at an elevation of 130 m OD (Fig. 5). The site slopes downwards to the east, south, and west, so that the contours of the slope form an arc across the southern part of the site. The slope begins gently with a gradient of about 1-in-26, or 0.04, but becomes steeper towards the southern edge of excavation, increasing in its gradient to 1-in-10, or 0.1. The southernmost tip of the site lies at a height of c 115 m OD. The local geology is highly variable over a relatively small area and consisted of bands of Forest Marble Limestone, White Limestone Formation and Signet Member, all of which date to the Bathonian Age in

# *Cirencester before Corinium*



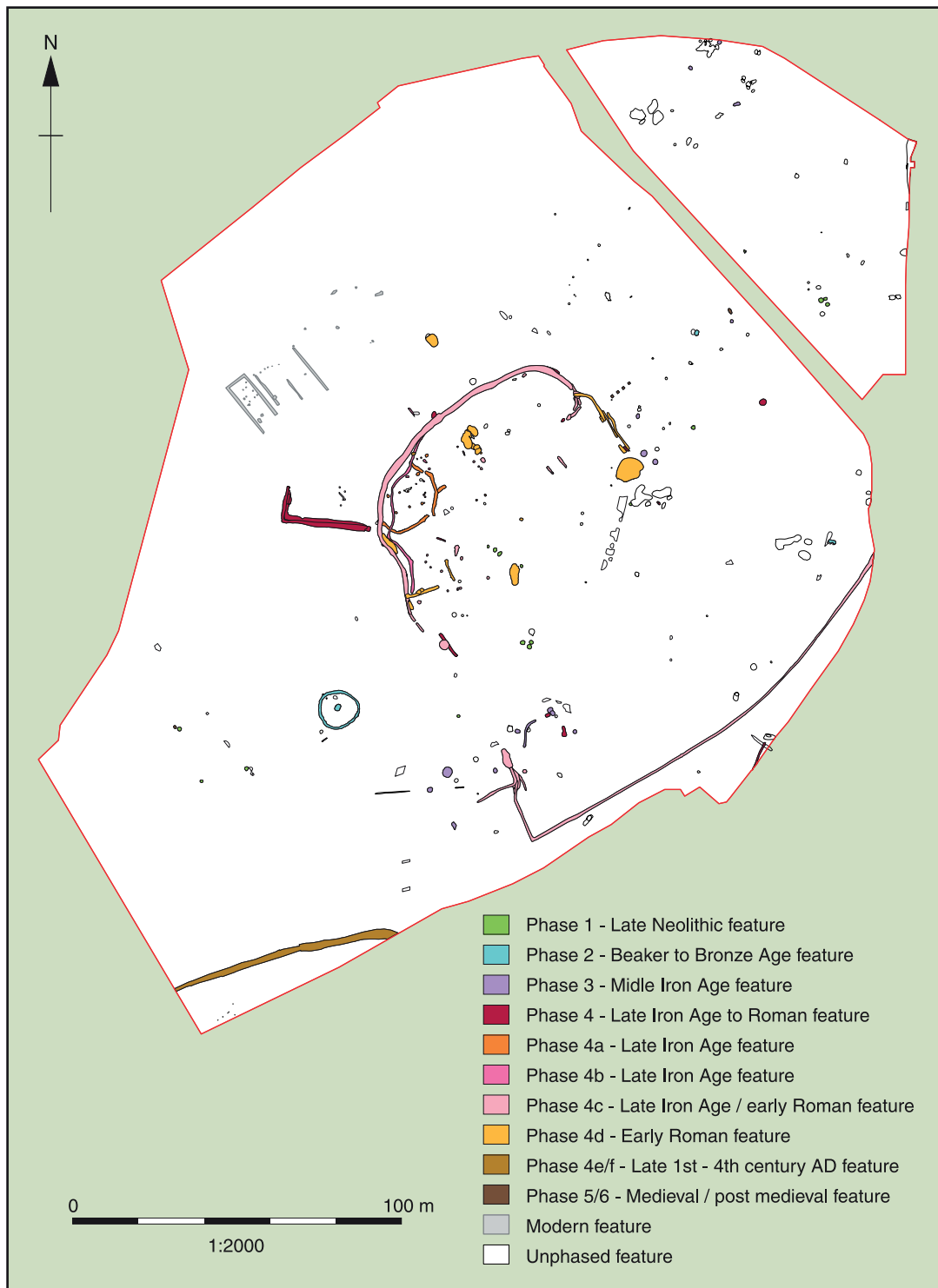
Fig. 1 Site location and archaeological background



Fig. 2 Areas of investigation



Fig. 3 Aerial view of the site (image courtesy of Jane Randle)



*Fig. 4 Plan of all excavated features, showing phasing*



the Jurassic Period. Derivative fine loamy, clayey soils of the Elmtun 2 association and loose fossiliferous limestone or cornbrash overlie the solid geology.

#### Archaeological and historical background (Figs 1 and 44)

The archaeological potential of the Kingshill North development site was evaluated through desk-based assessment (JSAC 2001; 2005), geophysical survey (GSB Prospection 2000; 2006) and trial trenching (OA 2006). At least two round barrows, known as the Tar Barrows, survive on the north side of Burford Road and are protected as Scheduled Monuments (County number 268). Two further possible barrows are recorded by the county

Historic Environment Records (HER) database. One is located on the north of the Burford Road (HER 2096), while the other (HER 2125) is located northwest of Whiteway Farm, c 2.5 km from the development area. A survey by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England) revealed potential ditches showing as cropmarks immediately southeast of the development site on the edge of London Road. More cropmarks, identified as enclosures, were recorded some 500 m south of the Kingshill North at the Beeches. Another concentration of enclosures was detected c 1 km south of those (Leech 1977, 7).

In 1999, archaeological work in advance of residential development at the Beeches provided an opportunity for some of the cropmarks to be investigated (Fig. 1). The fieldwork revealed significant

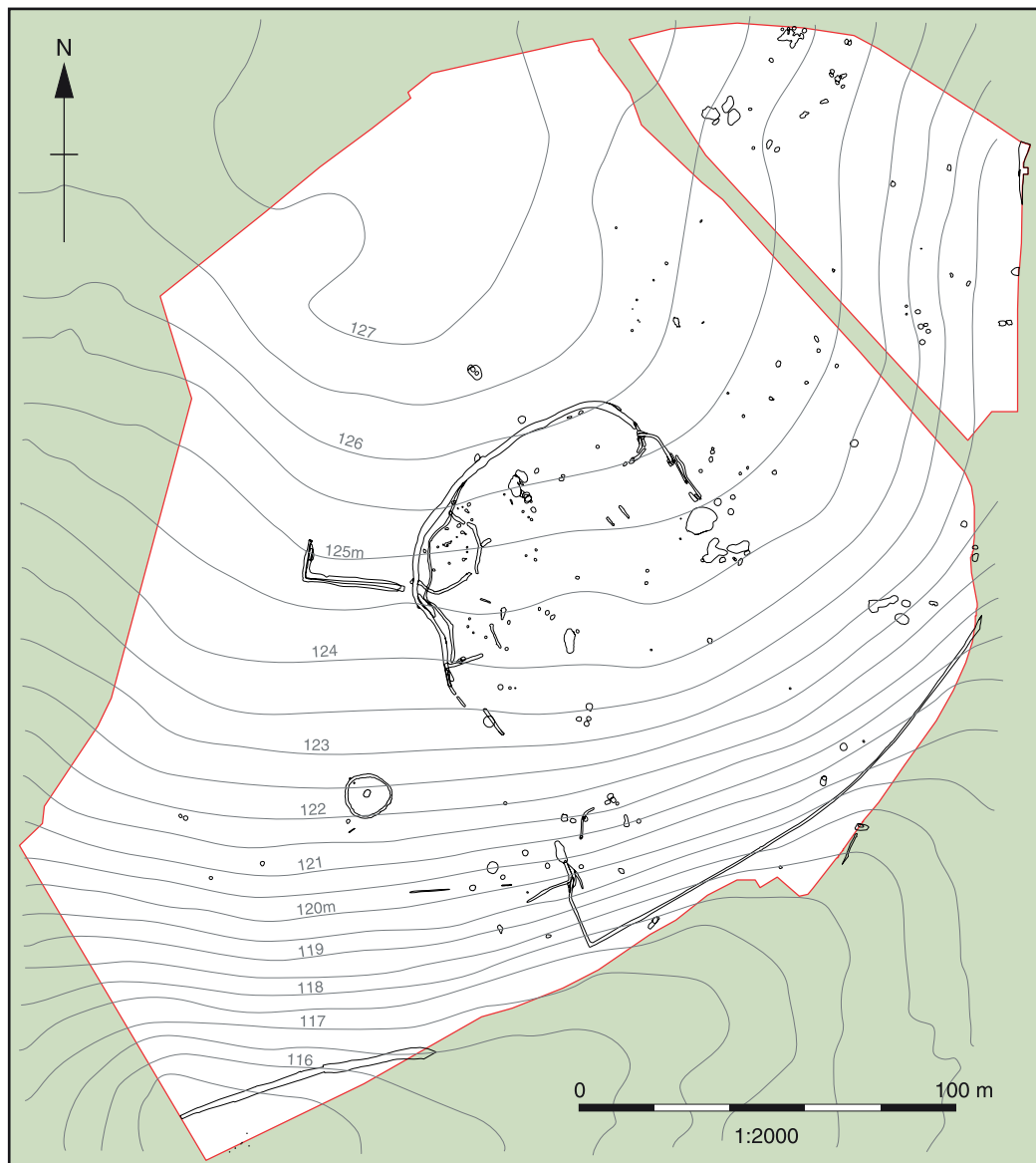


Fig. 5 Topography of Kingshill North

evidence of prehistoric activity on the site (Young 2001). Two excavation areas were examined in detail, one containing an enclosure and postholes dating to the middle Bronze Age, the other containing a ditched enclosure dating to the early Iron Age (HER 17205; Young 2001). The cropmarks further south were investigated in excavations at Kingshill South to the south-east of Cirencester on the town's ring-road (Fig. 1). The work uncovered shallow ditches that were attributed to the 1st, and possibly the 2nd, century AD (Reece 1990, 39-40). Further excavations in that area by Oxford Archaeology revealed a ditch dated to the Neolithic period by Grooved Ware pottery, early Roman enclosures and boundary ditches (possibly forming part of the archaeology discovered by Reece), and a villa-like building and associated apsidal structure assigned to the mid and late Roman periods (Ken Welsh, pers. comm.).

An evaluation in 2006 by OA (Fig. 2) uncovered remains of a crouched human burial associated with Beaker pottery (recorded as 1402, see below). Another burial, associated with a ring ditch, was identified but remained unexcavated until the excavation (8588). A third burial, a supine human inhumation (1905) was recorded further east. The fieldwork also identified a number of features in the central part of the site that could be broadly dated to the later Iron Age, including a large oval enclosure, gullies and structural features. These were all re-examined during the subsequent excavation.

The Iron Age activity at Kingshill North was part of a regional settlement pattern that included enclosures at Middle Duntisbourne and Dunstisbourne Grove (Mudd *et al.* 1999b, 95), pits at Stratton (Wymark 2003), and an earthwork complex at Bagendon and related enclosure at Ditches (Trow *et al.* 2009) (Fig. 44). Further south, the extensive archaeological landscape down the River Churn and more widely within the Upper Thames Valley is also of enormous relevance to Kingshill North. The prehistoric and Roman settlements at Cotswold

Community (Powell *et al.* 2010), Claydon Pike (Miles *et al.* 2007), Ashton Keynes (Powell *et al.* 2008) and Latton Lands (Powell *et al.* 2009) provide key points of comparison.

Roman Cirencester (*Corinium*) was established first in the Churn valley as a fort in the mid 1st century AD, before developing into a town after c AD 75 (Wacher and McWhirr 1982) (Fig. 1). The town replaced the Bagendon/Ditches complex as a regional centre, but a villa was maintained at Ditches until the 3rd century (Trow *et al.* 2009, 45-6). The extra-mural area to the north-east of the town saw little activity and formed part of the rural landscape (Holbrook 2008a, 138).

Cirencester was re-established as a major centre in Gloucestershire by the time of Domesday (1086) and was one of only four Gloucestershire towns recorded as having a market at that time, although there may have been more. A small medieval settlement existed in the area around Norcote Farm, c 500 metres east of the development site. The post-medieval period saw the Burford Road, Akeman Street and London Road develop as turnpikes. By the early 19th century, an area of parkland, Hare Bushes, had been established. It was bounded to the south by Burford Road and around much of the perimeter had belt planting typical of later 18th-century 'naturalistic' parkland layouts.

The local geology lent itself to lime production. Evidence of this is contained in the local field name 'Lime Kiln Ground' (HER 9822). Limestone may also have been extracted for building stone or road making, and the south-easternmost part of the development area is shown on some earlier maps as 'Quarry Forestal'. During the early part of this century the north-western part of the proposed development area was used as a rubbish pit, presumably after quarrying for limestone, although this has not been identified on early OS maps. Geotechnical test pitting in connection with the development has identified the extent of this quarried area.